



## PROBING

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER

Faculty, OU Israel Center

## THE PROPHETS

The special haftarah selection that is read for Shabbat Shekalim tells the story of King Yehoash. Over these years, I have shared with you the background of the story found in this haftarah, i.e., the story of the earlier years of the King. We discussed his ascension to the throne at the age of seven and how he managed to survive his grandmother's attempt to wipe out the entire royal family. We also mentioned how his rescuers, his uncle, the Kohen Gadol, Yehoyada, and his aunt, Yehosheva, hid him the Bet Mikdash itself while they brought him up for his first seven years. This story of King Yehoash helps us better understand the political and religious reality that was to be found in the Judean Kingdom at that time and makes for a fascinating saga with moral lessons for us all. But all of that is but a background to the story told in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> prakim of M'lachim B, the story of the King's campaign to raise the funds for the repair of the Bet HaMikdash. The story of donating shekels and the reason it was selected as the haftarah for this Shabbat.

The reason why the mitzvah of "Machatzit HaShekel" is connected specifically to this Shabbat of the year, is, as the Mishna explains, that the collection of the one half shekel was observed in the month of Adar, hence, the Shabbat before (or of) Rosh Chodesh Adar was designated as Shabbat

Shekalim. This, the first of the four special maftir readings that precede Pesach, was established because the funds that were raised during this time were used for the communal offerings in the Bet Mikdash as well as for the repair of the roads leading to Yerushalayim, thus aiding the pilgrims in their travel to the Holy Temple for upcoming chag of Pesach.

I would suggest, however, that this theme of "Shekel" also teaches us a lesson about Purim that we hope to be celebrating in a few weeks. Purim is the time of "V'nahafoch Hu", a celebration of a "topsy-turvy" story in which what should have occurred and what WAS expected to happen – DID NOT and what was NOT expected and should NOT have occurred – DID! The unexpected happened and saved the Jews.

It is a story of change – unexpected change.

Vashti WAS the Queen – but that unexpectedly changed. Esther WAS a young orphan – but unexpectedly became the Queen. King Achashverosh decreed that the Jews be attacked – but surprisingly became their protector. Mordechai mourned and publicly dressed in sackcloth – but later was publicly marched through the streets in royal garments. And, of course, Haman was raised to the highest post by the King's decree – but ended his life hanging from the highest post by the King's decree.

Change, change, change. But I would suggest that it was more than change; it was “repair”. And that is what the Machatzit HaShekel was for as well. Consider: the mitzvah was given to the Jews in the desert to repair their relationship with G-d after they sinned with the Egel HaZahav, the Golden Calf. Similarly, the shekels raised by Yehoash were used to repair the Holy Bet Mikdash which had fallen into disrepair after over 100 years, and the Shekel did the same in Shushan. The decree that was to doom the Jewish community of Persia was signed after the promise of 10,000 shekels to be added to the king’s coffers. And those ten-thousand shekels did not only seal the King’s deal with Haman but also created a unity within the Jewish community that had been divided. There was a change! There was a repair! In the beginning of the story, the Jews were described as being “mefuzar um’forad”, scattered and separated, but after the shekels were promised and the decree was passed, the Jews banded together, fasted with Esther and, eventually, joined together, “nikhalu”, to defend themselves,. You see, the Shekel again led to repair, repair of a divided community who learned that they indeed are one nation and share the same fate.

Perhaps that is why it is said that G-d commanded each Jew to donate one-half of a shekel because, only by joining with another Jew, is one complete.

He is repaired. ■

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